



**BARBARA FERRER, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Ed.**  
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June 2, 2020

**TO:** Each Supervisor

**FROM:** Barbara Ferrer, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Ed.  
Director 

**SUBJECT: ENSURING THE SAFETY AND WELL BEING OF WORKERS AT  
INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES  
(ITEM NO. A-1, AGENDA OF MAY 26, 2020)**

This is in response to the May 26, 2020 motion by your Board directing the Department of Public Health (Public Health) in collaboration with our labor partners and the City of Vernon's Health and Environmental Control Department (Vernon) to: (1) evaluate facilities' COVID-19 mitigation and implementation plan for facilities with outbreaks to ensure compliance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) rules and recommended guidelines; (2) efforts by the facility operators for the impacted workers, their families, and the surrounding Southeast Los Angeles communities; and (3) a review of both Public Health's and the City of Vernon's jurisdiction and the sufficiency of current outbreak protocols for manufacturing and food facilities to reduce outbreaks and to report back to the Board within seven days.

**1. Facility COVID-19 Mitigation and Implementation Plans**

The role of Public Health and the City of Vernon's Health and Environmental Control Department is to ensure that manufacturing facilities and food facilities operate in compliance with all applicable local and state laws. This includes responding to outbreaks within these facilities. An outbreak is identified when three or more laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases occur at a facility that manufactures, processes, or serves food.

In the setting of an outbreak, the facility is required to have a mitigation plan which is focused on reducing the spread of COVID. These mitigation plans are based on guidance provided by CDC and Cal/OSHA specific to restaurants and manufacturing. In the event of an outbreak in any of these facilities, both Public Health and Vernon work with the facility to obtain a copy of the company's plan.

In addition to obtaining and reviewing the Plan, a site visit is conducted to ensure that these facilities have implemented and are adhering to the Plan with special emphasis on workplace infection control practices. Ongoing site visits are conducted to ensure sustained implementation of plans. In the event that any workplace exposures are identified, a referral to Cal/OSHA is initiated. Cal/OSHA conducts their investigations based on employee complaints or when a referral is made related to employee worker conditions. Public Health does not have a role in their follow-up; however, we may accompany them during their initial investigation.

## **2. Efforts by Facility Operators for Workers, Families and Community**

Public Health and Vernon work with facility operators to ensure that they understand and can communicate to their workers the risks of COVID-19 associated with their business operations, as well as the infection control practices and other actions that are required to mitigate the risk of further transmission. While there is no regulatory requirement for facilities to provide ongoing support to the community, Public Health and Vernon encourage business operators to implement measures that support their employees with paid sick leave policies and offering of free testing of employees. Public Health will ensure that workers and their employers are aware of testing resources in the community and that workers have access to information about the COVID-19 virus.

Additionally, Vernon has also provided financial assistance in the amount of \$200,000 to Alta Med Health Services Corporation (AltaMed) to facilitate and support free COVID-19 screening/testing services to residents in the Southeast Los Angeles Area.

## **3. Jurisdictional issues regarding public health within the City of Vernon**

The County of Los Angeles and Vernon have differing jurisdictions regarding public health issues that originate within the city. Vernon is an industrial city of 5.2 square miles located in southeast Los Angeles, with a population of approximately 250 residents and more than 1,800 businesses that employ approximately 54,000 people. Vernon has an established Health and Environmental Control Department (Department) that issues public health permits to restaurants and food processing facilities within the city. In addition, Vernon's Department regulates other environmental health programs, such as, hazardous materials and waste, garment manufacturing, wastewater, storm water, solid waste, and animal and vector control programs. To date, unlike every other public health jurisdiction in California, Vernon has not appointed a physician as its public health officer. Vernon has informed the County that it is in the process of selecting and appointing a physician City Health Officer. Additionally, Vernon, unlike other public health departments, does not have a communicable disease control program that is responsible for controlling the spread of infectious diseases. In light of Vernon's heavily industrial nature, its Health Department has historically allocated more resources to hazardous materials and CUPA programs.

Cities are required to appoint a health officer or make other arrangements by contracting with a county to have the County health officer perform that service for the city. Unlike all other cities within the County of Los Angeles (except Long Beach and Pasadena, which maintain their own public health departments and have appointed physician health officers), Vernon has not contracted with the County to serve as the Public Health Officer and to perform health officer services on their behalf. Because Vernon does not have an appointed physician health officer, Public Health has historically performed communicable disease control services to assist the residents and businesses in Vernon to control outbreaks. As such, the County's Health Officer, as delegate of the State Public Health Officer, maintains communicable disease control authority within Vernon, while Vernon's Department maintains jurisdiction over all environmental health matters. Public Health and Vernon's Department regularly work together to resolve disease outbreak matters. Moreover, the County Health Officer's current Reopening Safer at Work and in the Community Order does not exempt Vernon from the County's Public Health Jurisdiction, as it does for the cities of Long Beach and Pasadena. As such, the County Health Officer may take actions within Vernon to control the spread of COVID-19 among its residents and workers.

As previously noted, Vernon is in the process of selecting and appointing a physician City Health Officer. Vernon's Director of Health and Environmental Control Director, Freddie Agyin, joined the City in late 2018 after six years with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Division. Vernon's Department has emphasized that the City is committed to working with all external agencies and jurisdictions to protect the health of City residents, workers, and members of surrounding communities.

#### **4. Current Outbreak Protocols for Manufacturing and Food Facilities**

The outbreak protocols applicable to these business operations are covered under the Public Health protocols for workplace outbreaks contained in our Communicable Disease Control Manual. For COVID-19, the Acute Communicable Disease Control Program (ACDC) coordinates, collects and analyzes epidemiologic and testing data, makes disease control recommendations (especially around testing and exclusion from work), and summarizes the investigation of these outbreaks. Ill employees and their close contacts are to be excluded from work per the County's Health Officer Order for isolation and quarantine, respectively.

As mentioned above, each food facility is required to have and follow a Mitigation and Implementation Plan to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These plans should adhere to standard control measures that are contained in Health Officer Orders, but for larger outbreaks that are ongoing, Public Health makes site visits to observe the worksite, observe disease control practices, and make additional recommendations that may be necessary to help prevent further spread of disease. This may occasionally require temporary closure of a facility, especially if large numbers of people have been exposed and there is substantial risk that health cannot be protected without such closure.

Because the number of COVID-19-related outbreaks is currently large, the ACDC program requires assistance in making contact with these facilities, collecting data, and issuing control measures and Health Officer Orders for the prevention of COVID-19 in food facilities and for the isolation and quarantine of COVID-19 cases and contacts in these workplaces. For those outbreaks that occur in food facilities, including restaurants, grocery stores, food distribution facilities, food warehouses and food production plants, Public Health investigation also includes our partners from Public Health's Environmental Health division which has knowledge and experience in working with these types of facilities and in enforcement of public health and food safety regulations. For the large portion of the County exclusive of Long Beach, Pasadena and Vernon, Public Health's ACDC and Environmental Health division directly coordinate their efforts. For the City of Vernon, ACDC and County Environmental Health both work closely with the city's Health and Environmental Control Department.

#### **Smithfield Farmer John Outbreak Update**

Current status as of May 31, 2020: Smithfield Farmer John, 3049 E. Vernon Ave. Vernon, CA 90058

This plant, with a total of 1,837 employees, is under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. There are 165 employees who have tested positive to date; of these, 157 have been identified as residents in Los Angeles County Public Health jurisdiction that have been reported and investigated by the County, two are residents of San Bernardino County, and two are from City of Long Beach. Four cases have address and contact information pending verification.

Vernon has been investigating this outbreak since April 2020, when the Smithfield plant reported six cases of COVID-19 in employees. The outbreak began in the ham deboning section of the plant. Vernon Health and Environmental Control Department made a site visit in April 2020 and found the plant response satisfactory. According to Vernon, the plant staff are following all the CDC and Cal/OSHA recommendations. They have also provided testing for all employees that want to get tested. The plant has instructed all employees who have tested positive and their co-workers who may have been exposed to stay home. The plant does provide sick leave to workers. Among diagnosed workers, 58 have been approved to return to work by CDC criteria.

Control measures enacted by the plant include:

- All employees receive a thermal scan and health screening as they enter the plant
- Social distancing is enforced for the screening
- Hand sanitizer stations are available
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is provided; gown, gloves, mask along with safety helmet and goggles and face shield as needed

- Education on COVID-19 and prevention is provided in English and Spanish on video and posters
- Extra cleaning and disinfection of the plant and employee areas
- Restricting non-essential visitors
- Installation of sheet plastic and Plexiglas barriers in areas where six-feet distancing is not possible

On May 26, 2020, Public Health sent the attached letter to Smithfield Farmer John plant management. The letter included the following requirements:

- Provide Public Health with a daily line list including address of residence as this outbreak requires continued close monitoring;
- Continue health screening of all employees daily;
- Continue to require PPE use;
- Test all employees working at the plant as there may be asymptomatic persons among the workers. If workers do not want to be tested, they will have to be quarantined for 14 days, because of the extent of the outbreak, they are considered to have been exposed to COVID-19. Ensure test results for employee is received by the facility prior to clearing the employee to return to work and that all results are reported to Public Health, with positive results being reported the day they are received;
- Thorough deep cleaning of all surfaces, especially those that are high contact (including but not limited to doorknobs, faucets and other surfaces that are frequently touched). Please follow CDC guidance;
- Ensure all staff who have been within 6 feet of a confirmed case for greater than 15 minutes are quarantined for 14 days regardless of test results. Staff should receive paid sick leave during this time; and
- Review isolation and quarantine Health Officer Order with the plant employees.

The plant was notified that short-term closure may be required to complete these tasks and to ensure the safety of workers.

Effective control of the spread of COVID-19 within worksites requires both effective control measures within the facility as well as assurance that ill and exposed workers comply with orders to remain in isolation and quarantine, respectively, in compliance with timelines prescribed by the CDC. Public Health interviews all cases and contacts within the County and will continue to identify opportunities to assure compliance with orders to isolate and quarantine. Because workers are also at the same time community members, Public Health anticipates that recent and future changes in restrictions related to COVID-19 may increase the risk of outbreaks in worksite settings and other locations.



Public Health will continue to work closely with industrial facilities and cities to assure that strategies necessary to control the further spread of COVID-19 are implemented. However, these measures are more likely to be successful at protecting worksites to the extent that other businesses, activities, venues, and members of the public comply with protocols and restrictions specified by the state of California and by the Health Officer's current "Reopening at Work and in the Community" Order. Public Health will continue to inform your Board of the number and status of outbreaks occurring in the County of Los Angeles, which now number more than 500, as well as provide recommendations on actions that may be necessary to maintain the decrease in hospitalizations and deaths that has been recently observed.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please let me know.

BF:jg

Attachment

c: Chief Executive Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Office, Board of Supervisors



**BARBARA FERRER, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Ed.**  
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Director, Disease Control Bureau

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May 26, 2020

Greg Hernandez, Plant Manager  
Smithfield Farmer John  
3049 E. Vernon Ave.  
Vernon, CA 90058



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**Outbreak at Smithfield Farmer John Plant, OB #2020130**

The Los Angeles County (LAC) Department of Public Health (DPH) Acute Communicable Disease Control Program (ACDC) is conducting an investigation regarding a confirmed outbreak of COVID-19 at the Smithfield Farmer John meat processing plant. The DPH ACDC investigation began on May 18, 2020 after a referral by the City of Vernon Health and Environmental Control Department. On May 20, 2020, DPH ACDC received, for purposes of its outbreak investigation and control of COVID-19, a case line list from Smithfield Farmer John in order to monitor the outbreak. As of May 20, 2020, DPH ACDC approximately 116 Smithfield Farmer John employees had been diagnosed with COVID-19.

***Current status as of May 24, 2020:***  
***Smithfield Farmer John, 3049 E. Vernon Ave. Vernon, CA***

The plant is under the jurisdiction of the USDA. There are a total of 1,837 employees at this plant. As of May 24, 2020, there were 153 employees who have tested positive to date. DPH has a line list of the cases from Smithfield Farmer John; however, the line list does not include home addresses of the individual employees as a variable. DPH has requested that Smithfield Farmer John immediately amend the line list to include the address of residence for all employees that have tested positive for COVID-19. DPH ACDC expects to have the amended line list with addresses for employees by Tuesday, May 26, 2020, so that ACDC ensures that it is able to quickly provide public health follow-up. LAC DPH will interview every case and identify their contacts. Then we follow up on the contacts in order to keep our communities safe.

Vernon Environmental Health (EH) has been investigating this outbreak since April 2020, when the Smithfield Farmer John plant reported 6 cases of COVID-19 in employees. The outbreak began in the ham deboning section of the plant. Vernon EH made a site visit in April 2020 and found the plant response satisfactory. According to Vernon EH, the plant staff are following all the Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) and CalOSHA recommendations. Smithfield Farmer John has also provided testing for all employees that want to be tested. The plant has instructed all employees who have tested positive and their co-workers who may have been exposed to stay home. The plant does provide sick leave to workers. Among diagnosed workers, 41 have been approved to return to work by CDC criteria.

***COVID-19 Control Measures That Have Been Implemented by Smithfield Farmer John:***

- All employees have a thermal scan and health screening as they enter the plant. Social distancing is enforced for the screening.
- Hand sanitizer stations are available to all employees.
- PPE is provided; gown, gloves, mask along with safety helmet and goggles and face shield as needed.
- Education on COVID-19 and prevention is provided in English and Spanish on video and posters.
- Extra cleaning and disinfection of the plant and employee areas is being done.
- Non-essential visitors are restricted from entering the plant.
- Sheet plastic and Plexiglas barriers have been installed in areas where 6 feet distancing is not possible.

***LAC DPH COVID-19 Outbreak Investigation Requirements:***

- Smithfield Farmer John provide ACDC with a daily line list including address of residence as this outbreak requires continued close monitoring;
- Continue health screening of all employees daily;
- Continue to require PPE use;
- Test all employees working at the plant as there may be asymptomatic persons among the workers. If workers do not want to be tested, they will have to be quarantined for 14 days, because of the extent of the outbreak, they are considered to have been exposed to COVID-19. Ensure test results for employee is received by the facility prior to clearing the employee to return to work and that all results are reported to LAC DPH, with positive results being reported the day they are received.
- Thorough deep cleaning of all surfaces, especially those that are high contact (including but not limited to doorknobs, faucets and other surfaces that are frequently touched). Please follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance (CDC):  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-manufacturing-workers-employers.html>



Greg Hernandez, Plant Manager  
May 26, 2020  
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- Ensure all staff who have been within 6 feet of a confirmed case for greater than 15 min are quarantined for 14 days regardless of test results. Staff should receive paid sick leave during this time.
- Review isolation and quarantine Health Officer Order with Smithfield Farmer John employees;
- Short term closure may be required to complete these tasks and ensure safety of workers.

Please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Roshan Reporter at [reporter@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:reporter@ph.lacounty.gov) if you have questions regarding this letter.

Thank you for your prompt attention to the items above. With due diligence, this outbreak can be brought under control so that the plant can keep functioning and we can protect those living in our communities.

Sincerely,



Sharon Balter, M.D., M.F.A.  
Director, Acute Communicable Disease Control Program

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